



OESNEWS

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 31, 2008

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Designation of State Hazard Mitigation Plan as "Enhanced" by FEMA Recognizes State's Leadership in Efforts to Save Lives, Protect Property; Also Paves Way for Additional Funds

California's reputation as a national leader in mitigating against the impacts of earthquakes, fires, floods and other natural disasters has been validated by the United States Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), paving the way for the state and local agencies in California to receive millions of dollars in additional federal hazard mitigation funds over the next three years.

In a December 17, 2007, letter to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), FEMA Region IX administrator Nancy Ward announced that the *2007 State of California Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan* had been designated as an Enhanced State Mitigation Plan. This designation will remain in effect until 2010 when the Plan must be revised and resubmitted for FEMA review and approval.

OES is aware of only 11 other states that have mitigation plans deemed by the federal disaster agency as "enhanced."

"FEMA's designation of our state's plan as 'enhanced,' officially recognizes California's leadership in reducing the risk of death, injuries and property losses from natural and human-caused hazards," said OES Director Henry Renteria.

Prior to putting its stamp of approval on the State's blue-print for hazard mitigation as an "enhanced" plan, FEMA determined that the plan had met all basic criteria for acceptance as a "standard" plan under provisions of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. That qualified the State to receive hazard mitigation grants of up to 15 percent of the total individual and public assistance funds spent by FEMA after each Presidential Disaster Declaration.

An amendment to Disaster Mitigation Act of 2003 passed in 2006 increases the cap to 20 percent for states with enhanced plans.

Following recent Presidential Disaster Declarations, state, local and qualified non-profit agencies have utilized mitigation funds provided by FEMA, along with their own funds and in-kind matches, for property risk-reduction projects such as the elevation of endangered buildings in floodplains, implementation of watershed management projects, seismic upgrades to hospitals, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and the development of local hazard mitigation plans.

"Having an enhanced hazard mitigation plan means California could get hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars in additional federal hazard mitigation funds to pay for important projects after each Presidential Disaster Declaration," noted Renteria.

Some unique features of California's plan include discussions on recent issues such as levee failures, landslides and potential tsunamis events. There's also a geographic information system (GIS) risk assessment, strategic mitigation action list, and detailed accounts of how OES manages federal mitigation funds in a cost-effective, timely manner.

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The plan was developed by a multidisciplinary team of subject matter experts from OES and more than 40 other state departments and agencies and representatives of local government and private-sector associations.

In addition, OES partnered with a team from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, to bring the vision of the multi-hazard plan for a safer California closer to reality. The faculty-student team was headed by Ken Topping, lecturer and former City of Los Angeles planning director; Professor William Siembieda, head of the nationally recognized City and Regional Planning Department; and Associate Professor Michael Boswell, who supervised graduate students who analyzed over 400 local mitigation plans.

“This plan will serve as an extremely useful guide for all of California’s cities and counties as they prepare their own local hazard mitigation plans,” said Renteria. “It will also help state agencies improve their efforts in disaster response and loss prevention.”

“Putting together an enhanced hazard mitigation plan is a grass-roots process,” said Nancy Ward, administrator of FEMA’s Region 9 headquarters in Oakland. “California deserves high praise for gathering input from their many local governments and involving all their key players from the ground up to get this job done. Once again this state has demonstrated that it holds a leadership position in emergency planning, response, recovery and hazard mitigation activities.”

A local hazard mitigation success story highlighted by California’s plan is a flood barrier wall erected around two mobile home parks in Yountville, California. The project was designed to protect homes from a 100-year or greater flood event on the Napa River, located approximately less than one-half mile to the east.

On December 31, 2005, the Napa River experienced major flooding from a weather system that brought heavy rain in the Napa Valley, including 7.8 inches in Yountville. Floodwaters reached a maximum height of four feet from the top of the barrier wall. No floodwater entered the mobile home parks, whereas floods in 1986, 1995, and 1997 had caused considerable damage and forced the evacuation of many elderly residents.

According to Myke Praul, Yountville Public Works Director, the flood wall project cost \$4.2 million, with \$3.2 million funded from FEMA hazard mitigation funds. The benefit estimated by Cal Poly experts was \$1.6 million for this single event, a cost savings that will be multiplied many times over by future repetitive floods in the area.

“It’s much cheaper and less disruptive in the long run to prevent losses from disasters before they strike by building safer and more sustainable communities,” concluded Renteria.

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